

# Reading Tea Leaves: Future Perspectives on Reading and Reading Education



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# Reading Tea Leaves

## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Implementation of the *Common Core State Standards* looms ever larger on the current landscape of educational practice.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

In this Common Core State Standards implementation, one cannot help but ponder the centrality of the role of the individual educational practitioner—the classroom teacher—in the overall success of this emerging process.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

The classroom teacher will be the  
lynchpin of success in  
implementing the new CCS ELA  
Standards!



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Teachers are recognized as among, if not the most important, contributors to students' learning once they reach the years of typical schooling (Darling-Hammond, 2004, 2006; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders & Horn, 1994).



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Assuming that the typical elementary school teacher is sufficiently well prepared to provide high-quality, effective reading instruction is likely unwarranted.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Although we want to honor the knowledge, skills, and professionalism of teachers, we cannot afford to stick our heads into the proverbial sand with respect to how much specialized knowledge typical elementary school teachers actually have about effective, evidence-based reading instruction.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Strickland et al. (2002) report that primary-grade elementary school teachers take an average of 1.3 courses in the teaching of reading in their preservice preparation program with a recent survey indicating a slight increase to 2.2 courses.

“Even with the slight increase, the total time spent on preparing to teach reading is entirely inadequate” (p. 21).





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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Somewhere between a quarter and a third of inservice teachers are receiving professional development about effective, evidence-based reading instruction in “one-shot” sessions. And we know that this type of professional development is not highly effective.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Common Core Standards place a premium on student outcomes as the principal indicators of teacher effectiveness.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Common Core Standards coupled with the documented lack of quality professional development support offered to underprepared reading teachers to implement them, and the assumption inherent in these Standards—that teachers need no specific guidance on “how to teach”—is questionable at best.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

The use of high-stakes testing to determine which teachers increase their students' literacy achievement is an integral feature of a robust and unrelenting culture of accountability (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011; Ravitch, 2010).



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

What evidence is there that publishing standards linked to carrying out large-scale testing programs assessing these standards leads to improved classroom instruction and/or higher student test scores in literacy?



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

This is not the first time in the U.S that policy makers have attempted to implement national education standards and accountability systems with very mixed and often disappointing results.

(Ravitch, 2010)



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

One must wonder a bit about the wisdom of developing assessments directly from standards rather than from a well-articulated curriculum, a well understood and defined set of learning progressions from basic to complex, and expertly crafted and classroom-validated lessons.

(Calkins, 2012; Ravitch, 2010)



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Teachers are left to imagine the nature and content of the CCS assessments that will be used to evaluate their work and their students' learning.





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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

The evidence base, as represented in Common Core Standards' bibliography, is lacking citations and references to several major national research syntheses that form a basis for what is largely accepted as the scientific evidence-base for teaching reading.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

*Reading First* was implemented to determine if spending billions of dollars in a few select low-achieving, high-poverty school districts to teach teachers the evidence-based practices of effective reading instruction along with stringent compliance guidelines would provide sufficient support and motivation for classroom teachers to use evidence-based reading instruction practices with sufficient diligence to realize the results as found in scores of well-controlled studies.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

A series of reports raise serious questions about how well the evidence-base of effective reading instruction has been disseminated among elementary, secondary, and special education teachers, let alone how well or frequently these practices are actually used in classrooms.

(Bell et al., 2001; Bos, et al., 2001; Frahm, 2010; Stotsky, 2009)



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Even if we assume the evidence-base has been adequately disseminated, the matter of practitioner compliance with evidence-based practices is a serious challenge.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Society has an abiding interest in and a right to expect that all professions will construct and ensure that practitioners comply with a rigorous system of generally accepted and evidence-based practices.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

To be optimally effective, professionals cannot simply and mechanistically comply with a set of generally accepted or evidence-based practices and remain thinking, responsible professionals.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

“They tried everything. They repositioned sinks, and had new ones installed. They bought \$5,000 “precaution carts” to make washing, gloving and gowning easy and efficient. They posted admonishing signs, and issued hygiene “report cards.” They even gave away free movie tickets as an incentive for cleaning up. Nothing worked!

Atul Gwande, 2007



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Gwande (2007, p. 19) laments: “compliance rates for proper hand hygiene improved substantially from 40 percent to around 70 percent. But—and this is the troubling funding–hospital infection rates did not drop one iota. Our 70 percent compliance just wasn’t good enough. If 30 percent of the time people didn’t wash their hands, that still left plenty of opportunity to keep transmitting infections. Indeed, rates of resistant *Staphylococcus* and *Enterococcus* infections continued to rise. . . .”





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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Practitioner compliance, like in medicine, of getting practitioners to diligently apply evidence-based practices and standards in their teaching is a thorny issue—one needing much more research and attention than has been given in relation to the rollout of the Common Core Standards in schools and classrooms nationally.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Practitioners need sufficient professional knowledge of and clinical skill to implement standards and evidence-based practices in diverse and often difficult education settings must be an integral part of the overall initial preparation and continuing professional development of the classroom practitioner.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Having an established set of Common Core Standards and evidence-based practices is only part of what is needed in total to bring about necessary and important reforms in educational practice and literacy education.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Ravitch writes, “Tests should follow the curriculum. They should be based on the curriculum. They should not replace it or precede it” (p. 16).



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Standards are not curriculum! Tests are not curriculum! A curriculum is intended to specify not only what is taught but also the sequence of what is taught along a clearly demarcated pathway of development from simple to complex.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

The learning progressions needed to adequately support student learning in order to achieve the Common Core Standards have yet to be composed or evaluated.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Classroom tested, validated lessons in education are in many ways the equivalent of treatment protocols in medicine. No serious effort to reform medical practice would leave to chance something as valuable and effective as treatment protocols. Yet in education, the equivalent of medical protocols - effective, clinically-validated lessons that diligently employ evidence-based practices, are habitually overlooked in U.S. educational reform efforts.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

We should not assume that teachers do not need guidance, support, and resources about how to teach to the CC Standards. The fact is that many current teachers and even those now exiting our teacher education institutions in the U.S. are poorly prepared in terms of knowledge and clinical skill at diligently applying evidence-based practices and in designing effective lessons for teaching reading.





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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Buyer beware of nationally-marketed Common Core Standards-based literacy instruction programs, often labeled Common Core Compliant, have not been field tested for effectiveness nor could they be without the requisite assessments in place.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

The CC Standards rollout process in most states and nationally has occurred in a way that neglects the development of a standards-based curriculum and the research and development necessary to produce validated lessons to enact the CC Standards into effective, evidence-based literacy instruction at the classroom level.



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## Common Core State Standards and the Practitioner

Even well-trained, highly-educated physicians are not expected to locally engage in the *de novo* creation of treatment protocols. Yet, the expectation in the new ELA Standards places the burden of local *de novo* creation of the curriculum and lessons on the backs of teachers. With a wink and a nod toward respecting teacher professionalism, the time, resources, expertise, and effort for every local school district or teacher to engage in *de novo* creation of a language arts curriculum and the accompanying lessons without an infusion of significant resources is unfathomable.



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Keep on gazing at those tea leaves as they swirl around in an uncertain Common Core Standards (CCS) future.

